

## Mebo 2 Timeline - by Ian Biggar

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Many of us enjoyed the programming from Radio Nordsee International between 1970 and 1974. The Mebo 2 was almost iconic to offshore and indeed general radio enthusiasts. Most of us know that she eventually sailed to Libya and was used by the authorities there. However I don't believe that anyone had tried to document her final years, so this is what I have attempted to do with the following

**February 9<sup>th</sup> 1977**:- The Mebo 2 and Angela arrive in Tripoli at 0900. The local authorities had difficulty in understanding the Latin lettering on the ships' documents, however after studying the instructions on the fire extinguishers (!) they informed the Captains that their papers are in order.

**February 14<sup>th</sup> 1977**:- The ships drop anchor side by side in Tripoli harbour, 150 metres out. The ships are so close together than crew can jump from one to the other. During the rest of February and into March, Robin Banks conducts a number of non stop music test transmissions. These are made using the RCA 100 kW transmitter at reduced power of 40 kW on 1232 kHz, normally from 2000-2300 local time, 1800-2100 GMT. The higher power tests had to cease as they were found to be causing interference to local telecommunications on shore. Some further tests were made on 773 kHz using the former Radio Veronica 10 kW Continental Electronics transmitter, which replaced the old Radio 390 rig on the Mebo 2. The second Veronica transmitter is still carried as cargo on the Angela.



**May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1977**:- The first of a widely heard series of tests are conducted on 773 kHz, 6205 kHz and 90 MHz. These are normally heard from 1800-2300 GMT with Man of Action played on the hour and half hour, along with a frequency announcement by Robin Banks. No station name is given. However on several occasions the station was noted earlier, for example on Thursday May 5<sup>th</sup> the transmissions were heard as early as 1500 GMT.

**May 19<sup>th</sup> 1977:-** The station adds an additional outlet on 9810 kHz in the 31 metre band. Again on some days the transmissions can be heard earlier in the day. On Sunday May 22<sup>nd</sup> the station was heard at 1200 GMT when the Russian home service transmission ended on the channel.

**May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1977:-** The station is heard near Oslo, Norway on 6207 kHz (with 10 kW) in the 49 metre band and on 9810 kHz in the 31 metre band at 1900 GMT, and later in the evening also on 773 kHz via one of the ex-Radio Veronica 10 kW (putting out 8 kW) Continental transmitters at 2210 GMT. Announcement atop the hour at 1900: "You're tuned to a transmitted test program in the MW band on 773 kHz, 388.1 metres. We're also broadcasting in the 49 metres SW band at 6205 kHz and in the 31 metre SW band at 9810 kHz and on VHF/FM at 90 MHz. This transmission concludes at 1 AM that's 2300 hours GMT." (Voice of Robin Banks aka Robin Adcroft over Man of Action.)

Log on 773: Man of Action, ID+ "This is the place that's gonna blow your mind" jingle ex RNI, // 6207 kHz. Pop mx format Abba, Neil Diamond etc. QRM Egypt, plus some unidentified stations.

**May 23rd 1977 :-** When the 49 metre band transmitter was switched on at 1758, a frequency change to 6210 kHz had been made. Reception was poorer and suffered from teleprinter and SSB interference.



**May 29<sup>th</sup> 1977:-** Tests every night noted on 6210 kHz. "Caroline" by Fortunes played amidst old RNI jingles.

**June 19<sup>th</sup> 1977:-** The station is heard opening on 6210 kHz at 1100. The signal fades as the day progresses. It seems that the station is off the air as 1800 approaches, but at 1758 the transmitter was back on 6205 kHz. No transmission monitored on 9810 kHz. Seems that the evening before was the final one on 31 metres.

**June 29<sup>th</sup> 1977:-** A relay begins of the English language programme of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya Broadcasting Corporation. This was heard daily from 1600-1740 GMT on 773 kHz, 6205 kHz and 90 MHz from the Mebo 2, as well as 1406 kHz from Tripoli.

The feed for the ship was taken off medium wave. These relays continued until July 16<sup>th</sup>. The usual evening music transmission from 1800-2300 was notable for the inclusion of RNI jingles.

**August 1<sup>st</sup> 1977:-** Station noted on 6205? kHz. "Swiss Lady" by Pepe Lienhard Band played plus usual Man of Action ID by Robin Banks.

**August 8<sup>th</sup> 1977:-** Both the Mebo 2 and Angela up anchor and sail for Benghazi.



**August 11<sup>th</sup> 1977:-** The ships arrive at Benghazi, but wait only an hour before sailing again to a position in Derna Harbour. This is about 600 miles east of Tripoli and just about as near as they could anchor to the Egyptian border. Relations between Libya and Egypt had become strained and the main reason for the move was to jam Egyptian Radio's transmissions on 773 kHz. This was effective in the Benghazi area, but not further afield as Egypt use 1000 kW on 773 kHz.

**August 17<sup>th</sup> 1977:-** The station broadcasts an hour of Elvis Presley music from 2200-2300 as this was the day of his death.

**August 30<sup>th</sup> 1977:-** The station is again heard in Norway on 773 kHz via one of the ex-Radio Veronica 10 KW Continental transmitters. It was fading up at 2200 GMT with Man of Action. Spain, Egypt and another station noted below.

**October 30<sup>th</sup> 1977:-** The Mebo 2 leaves Derna for a new anchorage at Benghazi.

**October 31<sup>st</sup> 1977:-** The last in this series of shortwave tests is made on 6205 kHz.

**November 1<sup>st</sup> 1977:-** The engineer on board the Mebo 2 is told by the Libyans that transmissions should only be made on 90 MHz FM. These transmissions continue nightly from 1600-2100 GMT.

**December 12<sup>th</sup> 1977:-** Tests are once again heard on 6205 kHz, today and on the 13<sup>th</sup>. The station announcement only mentions 90 MHz FM. Assume that 773 kHz is also on the air.

**December 25<sup>th</sup> 1977:-** The station is noted testing again on 6205 kHz and this seems to be the start of another nightly series of tests running from 1600-2100 GMT.

**January 1978:-** The 1978 WRTH lists the following under Libya, Country tables:

Shortwaves 6205 and 9810 10kW

Home Services: Tripoli 90 MHz

Additional information: "Radio Ship Mebo II": Test trs in **English** 1800-2300 on 773/6205 kHz+FM.(irr.rep. on 9810 kHz)

ANN: "....You're tuned to a tr. test program in the MW band on 773 kHz, in the MW band. SW 6205 kHz in the 49 m.b. and VHF 90 MHz."

**January 15<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** It seems like last nights broadcast was the final for now as nothing noted at 1600. Instead at 1800 Man of Action is played on 6205 kHz and engineer Jules Retrot is heard to announce that the Mebo 2 is 35 miles out of Benghazi. A further update was given at 2200 GMT. The ship is again on the move.

**January 19<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** The Mebo 2 returns to Tripoli.

**January 20<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** The ship is logged on 6205 kHz with a relay of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya Broadcasting Corporation (SPLAJBC) programme in English from their domestic foreign language service. This terminated at 1826 GMT after the playing of the Libyan national anthem, with switch off at 1827

**January 21<sup>st</sup> 1978:-** SPLAJBC heard on 6205 kHz in French starting at 1410 GMT, followed by English at 1600 through until 1827 with transmitter switch off at 1831. This proved to be the last transmission for a while.

**February 1978:-** It is believed that both ships were in drydock in Tripoli during this period. The Angela was repainted blue, white and black as well as having repairs to damage suffered en route from The Netherlands to Libya. The Mebo 2 was also re painted in red with cream flashes. After coming out of drydock the ship was tied up against the quay opposite the British Embassy in Tripoli.

**March 12<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** Broadcasts re-commence on 6206 kHz following the same schedule as January 21<sup>st</sup>.

**March 24<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** After the scheduled finish of the relay at 1828, a selection of Western pop records were played. These continued until 2130 GMT when "Man of Action" was played and another SPLAJBC relay commenced, this time in Arabic. This transmission ended at 2208.

**March 27<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** During the evening transmission "Man of Action" is played along with an announcement from Robin Banks that "You're listening to a programme of International music in the medium wave band at 1610 kHz, 186 metres, in the 49 metre band short band at 6206 kHz. All reception reports will be acknowledged by a QSL and the address to write to is Reception Reports, PO Box 113, Zurich 8047 in Switzerland". Again an Arabic relay was heard. The 1610 kHz transmissions are using the 10 kW Continental Electronics rig that was formerly on 773 kHz.

**April 5<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** On this day the Mebo 2 and Angela officially become the property of the Libyan Government. Lloyds report that at this point the Mebo 2 is removed from their register, as it is now a

naval ship. The Mebo 2 will change name to Al Fateh and the Angela to Almasira. The normal SPLAJCB relay is heard on 6206 kHz from 1410-1825 GMT. Non stop Western and Arabic music was played from 1842-1900, followed by Arabic speech and music until transmitter switch off at 2150. These transmissions are simulcast on 1402 kHz and 92 MHz FM from land based facilities in Tripoli.

**June 11<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** The domestic foreign language service of SPLAJBC commences programming from the radio ship Al Fateh anchored in Tripoli harbour. Three English speaking and three French speaking announcers came out to the ship on a daily basis to present the programmes live, with technical assistance from Printz Holman. This was necessary until the land studios are once again available. Following that, only the Holy Koran service will be broadcast from the transmitters onboard the Al Fateh.

**July 1<sup>st</sup> 1978:-** As predicted, the Holy Koran service replaces the domestic programming and can be heard on 6206 kHz using the 10kW RCA transmitter. These run from 0600-1800, but will be extended to 22 hours daily through Ramadan. These transmissions are also on 1610 kHz AM using the 10 kW ex Veronica transmitter.

**August 14<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** The final English language pop programme is broadcast from the Al Fateh in commemoration of the British Marine Offences Act. Holy Koran programming finished at 0400 GMT and 50 minutes later the transmitter was switched back on 6206 kHz. What followed was a programme hosted by Black Printz from 0500-0600 that concluded with the playing of "Man of Action". This would be the last time that famous tune would be heard from the former Mebo 2.

**August 18<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** The Koran transmissions on 1610 kHz are received by a listener in the UK. On the same day, the Almasira was photographed in the Grand Harbour, Valletta, Malta. She bore the colours of the official Libyan General National Maritime Transport Company, which is unusual as they only owned modern ships. For such an old vessel to carry these colours means the ship was bought by the government and there was no imaginable commercial use for her at the time. Almasira had been away from Tripoli since June 23rd and returned on August 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**August 25<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** The Al Fateh is in Zwara. (to be confirmed) The Koran transmissions on 1610 kHz with 10 KW are received by a listener near Kristiansand, Norway. They are in parallel to 6206 kHz, also with 10 kW. Signals are good at 2310 GMT.

**September 1978:-** The last of the European radio staff have left the Al Fateh and it is now in full control of the Libyan technicians.

**September 13<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** The Koran transmissions on 6206 kHz are once again received by a listener near Kristiansand, Norway, this time at 1730 GMT.

**September 1978:-** According to a note from the Communications Officer at the British Embassy in Tripoli, the Mebo 2 ceased Radio of the Holy Koran transmissions in September.

**December 10<sup>th</sup> 1978:-** Radio Viking DX World reports that transmissions from the Al Fateh in Tripoli harbour can be heard regularly on 6206 kHz in the late afternoon. Medium Wave Circle magazine reports that transmissions can also be heard on 1611 or 1612 kHz, possibly with 100 kW.

**January 1979:-** The 1979 WRTH lists the following under Libya,

Country tables: Shortwaves 6206 10 kW FM: Tripoli 90 MHz



**March 7<sup>th</sup> 1979:-** The British Embassy in Tripoli report that the Al Fateh is visible from the top of their chancery building. The ship was painted red with grey flashes and flying the Libyan flag, but bore no name.

**April 8<sup>th</sup> 1979:-** The Koran transmissions on 1613 kHz are received by a Norwegian listener near Kristiansand, Norway, at 0320 GMT. They are in parallel to 6206 kHz.

**June 13<sup>th</sup> 1979:-** A British offshore radio fan discovers the Al Fateh in the Grand Harbour of Valetta. She now clearly bore the name Al Fateh, Tripoli and was painted red with grey flashes. She later was dry docked and repainted green before returning to Tripoli during the first week of September.



*Mebo II in Malta - 1979*

**July 10<sup>th</sup> 1979**:- Sweden calling Dxer's report that "the Radio Ship Al Fateh, Tripoli fades in around 1240 GMT on 7165 kHz. Programming from the Holy Koran, but is subsequently jammed." Presumably this log was for the period before the ship moved to Malta.

**September 1979**:- The Medium Wave Circle magazine reports that the Al Fateh is now on 1605 kHz. It contains a log of a Holy Koran station on this channel at 2035 UTC.

**October 25<sup>th</sup> 1979**:- Koran transmissions on 1610 kHz received by another Norwegian listener near Oslo, Norway.

**January 1980**:- The 1980 WRTH lists the following under Libya,

"Al Fateh" Tripoli 1611 100 kW

Shortwave 7165 10kW

Home Services: Radio of the Holy Qu'ran, Libya from Radio Ship Al Fateh (ex Mebo II) in Arabic 0600-1800 on 1611/7165.

**January 19<sup>th</sup> 1980**:- Holy Koran Station noted on 1604.5 kHz at 1610 UTC

**February 7<sup>th</sup> 1980**:- Koran transmissions on 1610 kHz received in Bud, Norway at 0645 UTC in parallel to Libya on 1251 kHz. 1403 kHz was also heard but not in parallel.

**February 11<sup>th</sup> 1980**:- Koran transmissions on 1610 kHz received in Bud, Norway.

**February 24<sup>th</sup> 1980**:- Arabic programming noted on 1611 kHz, believed to be emanating from the Al Fateh as reported by the Medium Wave Circle.

**March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1980**:- The BBC's World Radio Club reports that the Al Fateh is re-broadcasting Holy Koran programming and you can find her on 7165 kHz and 1605 kHz.

**July 1980** :- Due to worsening relations between Libya and Malta, the transmissions via the Cyclops site were immediately ceased. According to Robin Adcroft the Al Fateh was moved to Zwara, west of Tripoli and used the 100kW RCA transmitter on 1233 kHz to substitute for the lost Maltese facility.

**July 20<sup>th</sup> 1980**:- Stig Hartvig Nielsen reports in Shortwave News,

6210, 0015-0105 off, July 20

Unidentified, non stop English pop music with jingles, possibly ex Mebo 2 ship now out of Tripoli harbour? SINPO 54544

**Postscript**:- The BBC report above was the last report with any certainty that I could find of the Al Fateh. It may not have broadcast for much longer after that date as, from details supplied by Robin Banks, he went to Libya during the second half of 1980 and supervised the de-commissioning of kit from the Al Fateh in Tripoli harbour. This was put in storage with the intention of installing on land. It is believed that this never happened.

A decision was made by the Libyan's to dispose of the Al Fateh and Almasira, mainly due to the servicing costs required by the Maltese yard. This was taken without full Government consent as, to some, the ship and its facilities were still a useful commodity.

The 1981 World Radio & TV Handbook has no medium wave listed, 7165 is listed as Tripoli 100 kW as are 6185 and 9600. Schedule is given as 0600-1800 on 7165 (no recent details received).

The frequency table at the back has 7165 with 10kW, other two 100kW.

Home Service relay is scheduled 1700-2255 on 6185 and 9600. There was no mention of the radioship.

There have been various reports of when the ships were eventually sunk by the Libyans, some saying as late as 1984. However it has been reported in the December 1981 issue of the Caroline Movement bulletin that official sources stated the ships were “damaged” whilst in the Mediterranean. Can we assume that this was in fact the final demise of the ships and that they were disposed by the autumn of 1981. Final verification is still being sought!

On 30<sup>th</sup> June 1983 in Glanmire, Co.Cork, Robin Banks was interviewed by a Norwegian visitor to ERI Radio about the state of the Mebo 2's transmitters. He then said “They are in cold storage.”

**Sources:-** *Robin Adcroft, Monitor Magazine, Offshore Echos, Caroline Movement, BBC, Radio Sweden, Mike Barraclough, Svenn Martinsen.*

*Ian Biggar - 27 July 2014*